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**Christianity and Female Empowerment:
The American Presbyterian Mission Schools in
Weixian, Shandong Province (1883-1920)**

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John R. Stanley

Abstract

Between the arrival of Robert Morrison in 1807, the first Protestant missionary to China, and the expulsion of Western missionaries in the early 1950s, one important area of missionary work for Chinese women was the establishment of schools at the primary, secondary and university levels. This educational work afforded girls and young women opportunities for advancement not provided under the existing patriarchal society. This article focuses on the development of the American Presbyterian primary and secondary education for girls in the rural area of Weixian in Shandong province. The Presbyterian station in Weixian played a leading role in establishing primary and secondary schools for girls throughout its mission field. Although the missionaries began with a conservative agenda of creating good Christian households at the time, the local population eventually embraced the schools. These girls' schools not only trained female students to become professional teachers but also enlightened and empowered them in the local cultural sphere.

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Introduction

Before the arrival of the Protestant missionaries Chinese women were educated to varying degrees. As far back as the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), women received some level of education. In the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) upper class women received a classical education and a larger percentage received “moral instruction.”¹ While the upper classes had access to private tutors and other means to educate their daughters, the middle and lower classes did not have the same access to institutions and resources. One missionary in Guangdong province reported that literacy rates for women ranged from 1% to 10%.² A major reason for this low literacy rate among women was that the private school system was primarily based on the *sishu* model designed to prepare students for the civil service examination. The civil service examination was male only. Therefore, families did not have much to gain by educating their daughters. Even for those girls with an education, the learning process ended at the time of marriage when child-rearing and other domestic duties took up most of their time.³ Although girls gained access to primary and secondary education after 1911, this was concentrated in urban areas and did not reach most areas until after 1920.

Since the nineteenth century, however, Protestant missionaries saw the education of girls as an important evangelistic opportunity. Their descriptions of Chinese women as "half paralytics" and "dead weights" provided the backdrop to their work to raise women out of these miserable conditions.⁴ They created new educational prospects for girls that the government and local community did not offer in the nineteenth century. By training female converts to work as evangelists, educators, medical assistants, and pillars of support for pastors, missionaries sought to advance the spread of Christianity in rural China.

This article primarily focuses on the work of the American Presbyterian missionaries throughout the area of the Weixian (Wei-hsien) station in central Shandong province.⁵ This station evangelized among the rural population and developed one of the most successful American Presbyterian educational systems in Shandong. Founded in 1883, it began with a single building and grew to encompass a compound containing two high schools, a large three-story hospital, the Arts College of the Shandong Christian University,⁶ a Bible School, and residences for the missionaries and teachers. In addition to its institutions, the station established schools and dispensaries throughout its field (approximately 500 square miles). It was the combined success in education, medicine, and evangelizing that made Weixian one of the most important stations for the Presbyterians in Shandong. In 1905 the station was reported to be "the chief educational center for [the] East and West Shantung [Shandong] Missions."⁷ The primary schools were the mainstay of the entire system and were key to the development of its policies and curriculum. By 1920 the missionaries recorded 2,022 students in ninety-two primary schools throughout Shandong; 31% of these students were in Weixian.⁸

Previous studies on education and Chinese women provide the background for this study. Since the publication of Jessie Lutz's insightful study of Christian colleges, scholars have examined the development of mission education as an important

instrument in spreading Western ideas in modern China.⁹ In addition to these institutional studies of Christian mission education, Gael Graham has shown how missionary education transformed the concept of gender in Chinese society. She specifically notes the importance of physical education activities in changing Chinese ideas of gender along American lines.¹⁰ While these scholarly works highlight the close linkage between Christian missions and social change in China, most studies have concentrated on the collegiate and secondary institutions in major treaty ports such as Shanghai, Tianjin and Guangzhou. One exception is Kathleen Lodwick's biographical study of Margaret Moninger, a pioneer woman educator on Hainan Island, China's southernmost territory, from 1915 to 1942.¹¹

The history of Christian primary schools is an understudied topic even though these schools were spread throughout China and arguably had a greater impact on the lives of the Chinese people, particularly those outside of the large coastal cities. These schools were especially important for girls because they rarely had access to formal education in the local society. Primary schools also brought Chinese girls into direct contact with Western women for the first time. This gave young girls a new role model for their future. This study seeks to examine the American missionaries' interactions with local girls in the primary schools, and the new educational and career opportunities provided for these girls in the mission school system.

The desire to engage girls through schools and bring women out of their subordinate position in society was largely motivated by the background of female missionaries. Most of these women were educated and most, if not all, came from the American middle class. Since the 1830s, women in this position had been slowly gaining stature, taking advantage of an educational system that was gradually opening to them.¹² Therefore, they saw education as an essential means for cultural change. As these female missionaries arrived in China, they believed that it was their calling to liberate women from their subordinate position in Chinese society.¹³ Education was an

ideal tool to accomplish this goal as it had been in their personal histories. Female missionaries were generally critical of Chinese society, even though their assessment was often simplistic and negative. It is common to find stories about the gratitude of local women for the missionary efforts to spread female education. However, these kinds of statements must be analyzed from two points of view. On the one hand, they illustrate the Western misconception of non-Western peoples as primitive and uncultured. On the other hand, these stories were used in missionaries' appeals to obtain more resources for their work, which was often underfunded compared with the development of the Christian boys' schools. It is evident that the goal of the missionaries was not necessarily to empower women per se, but initially to provide women with education to train better Christian wives, knowing how to raise the families in a religious environment and to further advance the evangelistic activities of the church. These tasks posed a challenge to the traditional family structure, and one unintended consequence was to enable the educated women to assert greater power over their own lives.

While the intention of this study is to look at the interaction between Western and Chinese women, it is problematic to reconstruct the Chinese female perceptiveness about their experience. Apart from some brief anecdotes, there are no documents written by Chinese women about their experiences in the Weixian station's schools in the American Presbyterian missionary archives. Personal testimonies and life stories of Chinese women did not usually exist until the 1920s when women took on a greater role in the administration of schools and had positions of authority. Female students in rural schools in Shandong province did not usually rise to these heights.

Therefore, we are left with the Western missionaries' descriptions of the encounter between Chinese and foreign women in the field of education. These accounts often contain elements of cultural imperialism with missionary women usually referring to Chinese women's lives as "slavish."¹⁴ There is also a notable change

in their descriptions once conversion had taken place, and the missionaries became more positive in their depictions of the lives of female converts. The missionaries' views on Chinese women were also distorted by the fact that they wrote to their home mission boards and friends to raise money and, therefore, they were likely to exaggerate and focus on some of the more negative aspects of Chinese society. The lack of a Chinese voice, however, does not lessen the importance of these Presbyterian mission schools as the sites of cross-cultural interactions. Western women continued to provide a new role model for young Chinese girls and women simply through their presence and involvement in the local Christian community and schools.

The American Presbyterian Mission in Shandong Province

The American Presbyterians became interested in China as early as the 1830s, but due to local opposition they were forced to initially focus their efforts on the Chinese population in Singapore. The First Opium War (1839-1842) opened China to the newly arrived Protestant groups.¹⁵ To avoid the health problems encountered in other mission fields, the Presbyterians chose the treaty port of Xiamen, approximately 400 miles north of Guangzhou, with its more hospitable environment for foreigners to establish their mission. Looking towards future expansion, Ningbo was made the base of the Presbyterian operations in 1848. They later moved up the coast to Shanghai in 1850.¹⁶

The settlements of the Second Opium War (1856-1860) completed China's submission to the Western presence and allowed for more extensive contact with the local population as foreign missionaries left the treaty ports for the interior. The American Presbyterians advantaged themselves by establishing the Beijing and Shandong Missions. In May 1861 Reverend Samuel Gayley and Reverend J. A. Danforth moved from Shanghai to the newly designated open port of Dengzhou in Shandong province.¹⁷ The arrival of three new missionaries, the "Shantung Triumvirate": John L.

Nevius (1861), Calvin Mateer (1863), and Hunter Corbett (1863) was important for the future work in the province.¹⁸ These three pioneers embarked upon both religious and secular endeavors that became the trademarks of the Presbyterian work in Shandong.

While successful in establishing stations in cities, missionaries did not always enjoy the same success in converting the local population. As late as 1888 the South China Mission reported only 419 communicants while the Central China Mission reported only 933 communicants. When compared to the numbers of the Shandong Mission, opened in 1861, with 2,858 communicants, one can appreciate why it was considered the most successful.¹⁹

Although converts came slowly, the Presbyterians became particularly active in founding schools and other educational initiatives, keeping in line with the general policy of the Presbyterian Church. This maintained that the establishment of "Schools, Colleges, and Theological Seminaries, in which candidates for the ministry might be elaborately and efficiently trained" was inseparable from the mission work.²⁰ Education was also seen as a way to "combat and expose the plausible errors that are circulated to undermine the faith of the ignorant."²¹ Missionaries in Shandong incorporated and expanded these ideas in their school system as more interior stations were opened.

The Shandong Mission was perhaps most notable for its efforts in the field of education. Calvin Mateer, whose high school (1864) became the Dengzhou College (1882), is generally acknowledged as the face of this movement.²² While Mateer busied himself with the expansion of education for boys, Helen Nevius, wife of the famous evangelist John Nevius, established the first girls' school in 1862. Although briefly discontinued due to her poor health, it was later reopened in Chefoo (Yantai). By 1880, girls' and boys' schools were operating in Chefoo and Dengzhou with a total of 161 students.²³

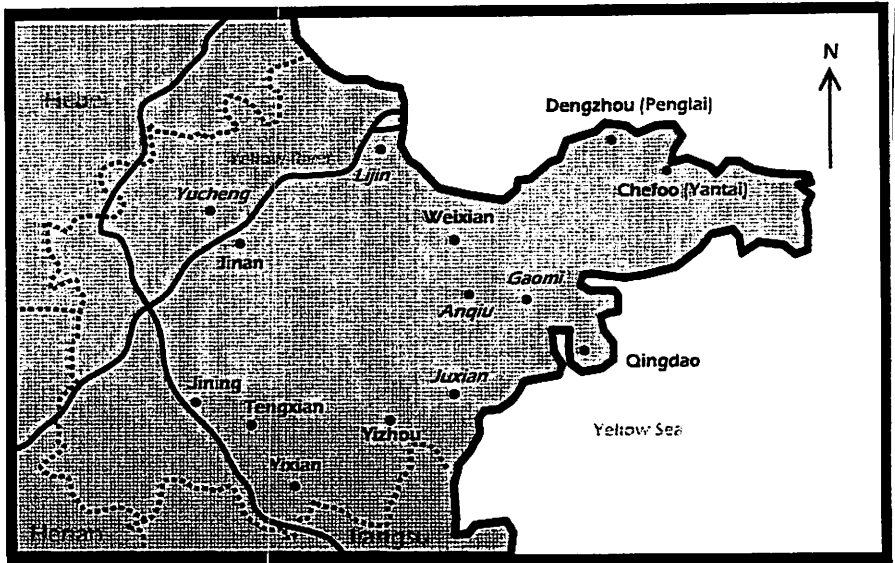
During this time they also developed a general list of rules for students and drew up a set curriculum for the girls' school in Chefoo. According to the document, the aim of the school was not to teach religious education exclusively, but to give a good general education to prepare leaders for the Church and community. The school offered courses such as arithmetic, geography, physiology, bookkeeping, introductory Chinese classical education, and general religious classes. To attract non-Christian students the school did not disqualify those who had bound feet, but once enrolled they were not permitted to begin the process. However, students of Christian parents who bound their feet after their parents converted were not permitted to attend the school.²⁴

The Presbyterian Interior Stations in Shandong

The incredible growth of the Presbyterian Mission in its first two decades inevitably led to new stations in the interior (Map 1). Jasper MacIlvaine was a pioneer in this effort and made the journey to Jinan, the provincial capital, to purchase buildings for the station. With one station opened, the mission set its sights on Weixian. Located at the intersection of three major east-west roads in the middle of the province it was a perfect location. In the beginning of 1883 Robert Mateer and John Laughlin arrived to lay the groundwork for the new station. Between August and December Laughlin erected the first schoolhouse where he and his family initially resided.

In 1885 Sadie Mateer, the first wife of Robert Mateer, was charged with opening the first school. Her first instinct was to open a school for girls. Mrs. Mateer reported that there was more ground to cultivate among women especially since the opportunity for education was not open to them. However, it was not felt expedient to do so and she opened a school for boys instead.²⁵ The problem, as she saw it, was the conservative nature of the population in Shandong and the need to have better relations with local people before embarking on this activity. The extreme conservatism in North China was an issue that the Weixian missionaries constantly ran up against. Chinese reformers,

Map 1: American Presbyterian Mission Stations and Evangelization Centers in Shandong, 1900²⁶



Note: Mission Stations are in bold.
Evangelization Centers are italicized.

such as Cai Yuanpei, also encountered this problem as they tried to open schools for girls in North China between 1900 and 1905.²⁷ The Weixian staff, however, did not lose sight of their early impulse to provide education for girls. Although it took more than ten years, the Wen Mei School officially opened its doors in 1895.²⁸

In every story of missionary work in China there is usually one or two individuals that shape the evangelistic policies at the station level. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Madge Mateer was the guiding light of the Presbyterian educational movement in Weixian. She was born Madge Dickson on April 4, 1860, in Shiremanstown, Pennsylvania, to John and Mary Dickson. After obtaining a medical degree in homeopathic medicine from Cleveland Medical College, she applied to become a foreign missionary in the Presbyterian Church. On October 7, 1889, her

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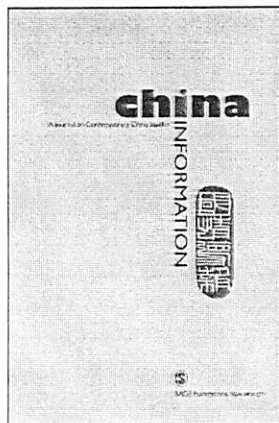
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⁷⁰ "Reply of the West Shantung Presbyterian Mission to the Circular of the General Board of Education in China," October 1907, PHS, MF10.F761a.r260.

⁷¹ At one point the missionaries stated: "So great is the demand for teachers in Government schools that unless we had a two year contract without graduates, we should have none for our own schools....already ten of our girls are teaching in government schools in Wei Hsien district alone." For details, see "Report of the Weihsien Station for the year ending August 20, 1913," PHS, RG82/6/2/20-2.

⁷² In addition to Madge Mateer, Grace Rowley, and Ralph Wells, the committee included Liu Guang-zhao and Wang Xiao-yi. *Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Shantung Mission, 1913*. PHS, 11-12.

⁷³ "Report of the Weihsien Station for the year ending July 11, 1914," PHS, RG82/8/8/20-2, 20 and 25.

⁷⁴ "Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Weihsien Station for the Year Ending July 1st 1917," PHS, RG82/13/12/20-2, 9.

⁷⁵ "R. Mateer to F. Ellinwood," September 1, 1890, Weixian, PHS, MF10.F761a.r207.

⁷⁶ "Personal Report of Mrs. R. Mateer, 1906-1907," PHS, MF10.F761a.r261.

⁷⁷ R. C. Wells and G. C. Wells, "Weihsien Quarterly Station Letter," January 26, 1914, PHS, RG82/8/7/102.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ *Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Shantung Mission of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Weixian: Shantung University Press, 1913), 2, PHS.

⁸⁰ "Report of the Weihsien Station for the year ending August 20, 1913," PHS, RG82/6/2/20-2 and "Weihsien Quarterly Station Letter," January 26, 1914, Weixian, PHS, RG82/8/7/102.

⁸¹ 77th *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1914*, PHS, 155; "Weihsien Quarterly Station Letter," January 26, 1914, Weixian, PHS, RG82/8/7/102; "Report of the Weihsien Station for the year ending July 11, 1914," PHS, RG82/8/8/20-2; and "J. Fitch to A. Brown," April 6, 1914, Weixian, PHS, RG82/8/7/43.

⁸² "Personal Report of Madge Mateer, Weihsien, Shantung, China, 1917-1918," PHS, RG82/16/1/20-8.

⁸³ Out of a total of seventeen teachers in the girls' primary schools, there were twelve female teachers. "Reply of the West Shantung Presbyterian Mission to the Circular of the General Board of Education in China," October 1907, PHS, MF10.F761a.r260.

⁸⁴ "Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Weihsien Station for the Year Ending July 1st 1917," PHS, RG82/13/12/20-2.

⁸⁵ McElroy, 349.

⁴⁶ The statistics given in the main text were gathered from the Annual Reports of the Foreign Board and the Annual Reports of the Weixian Station between 1885 and 1920. As the table shows there are gaps in the information, but the general trends are shown.

⁴⁷ "J. Fitch to A. Brown," November 24, 1903, Weixian, PHS, MF10.F761a.r256.

⁴⁸ Graham, 168.

⁴⁹ Unfortunately, the sources do not indicate how many Chinese or how many women were present on the committee. 77th *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1914*, PHS, 154.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Weihsien Quarterly Station Letter," January 26, 1914, Weixian, PHS, RG82/8/7/102; "Letter from J. Fitch to A. Brown," April 6, 1914, Weixian, PHS, RG82/8/7/43; and "Report for the Weihsien Station for the year ending July 11, 1914," PHS, RG82/8/8/20-2, 22-23.

⁵² "Report of the Weihsien Station for the year ending August 20, 1913," PHS, RG82/6/2/20-2.

⁵³ Paul Bailey, *Reform the People: Changing Attitudes Towards Popular Education in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 136.

⁵⁴ "Report of the Weihsien Station for the year ending August 20, 1913," PHS, RG82/6/2/20-2.

⁵⁵ "Letter from J. A. Fitch to A. J. Brown," April 6, 1914, Weixian, PHS, RG82/8/7/43.

⁵⁶ "Weihsien Quarterly Station Letter," January 26, 1914, Weixian, PHS, RG82/8/7/102; "J. A. Fitch to A. J. Brown," April 6, 1914, Weixian, PHS, RG82/8/7/43; and "Report for the Weihsien Station for the year ending July 11, 1914," PHS, RG82/8/8/20-2, 22-23.

⁵⁷ 81st *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1918*, PHS, 149.

⁵⁸ "Letter from J. A. Fitch to A. J. Brown," April 6, 1914, Weixian, PHS, RG82/8/7/43.

⁵⁹ Cui, 140.

⁶⁰ McElroy, 353.

⁶¹ "F. Chalfant's Personal Report for the Mission Year ending Sep. 1 1898," PHS, MF10.F761a.r217; and "Personal Report, Frank Chalfant, Wei Hsien Mission, China for the Mission year ending Aug. 31 1899," PHS, MF10.F761a.r217.

⁶² The Wen Mei School was referred to by two Chinese names throughout its history: 文美書院 (1895-1913) and 文美女子中學 (1913-1931). Wei Daoyuan, ed. *Shandong Weifang Erzhongxiao zhi, 1883-1993* [山東濰方二中校志·一八八三至一九九三] (Weifang: Weifang City Information, 1993), 7.

⁶³ "Letter from Mrs. R. Mateer," WWW 1, no. 2 (1886): 34.

⁶⁴ At the time the Dengzhou School was the main secondary school for girls for the Weixian field. "Jennie Anderson Laughlin to F. Ellinwood," November 28, 1890, Koong Sen, PHS, MF10.F761a.r207.

⁶⁵ 56th *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1893*, PHS, 249.

⁶⁶ It should be noted that of the original twenty-four students attending the new school some dropped out and some already had training at the Dengzhou school allowing them to leave early. Table 1 provides the increasing student numbers throughout the period of this study. "Report of Emma Boughton for year ending Sept. 1899," PHS, MF10.F761a.r217.

⁶⁷ The money for the building was donated in memory of Mrs. I. Faries of Minneapolis, the mother of Dr. William Faries.

⁶⁸ "Report of the Wei Hsien Station, China, for the Mission Year ending August 31, 1899," PHS, MF10.F761a.r217.

⁶⁹ "General Plan and Constitution of Girls' Boarding School," November 1882, Dengzhou, PHS, MF10.F761a.r205.

- ²⁴ "General Plan and Constitution of Girls' Boarding School." November 1882, Dengzhou, PHS, MF10.F761a.r205.
- ²⁵ "Letter from Mrs. R. Mateer," *WWW* 1, no. 2 (1886): 34.
- ²⁶ The map is adopted from Norman Cliff, "A History of the Protestant Movement in Shandong Province, China (1859-1951)." (Ph.D. diss., University of Buckingham, 1994), 71.
- ²⁷ In her article, Sarah Coles McElroy states, "the North appeared to be barren territory for promoting women's education during the early reform period." This was in contrast to the more progressive societies of Shanghai and the lower Yangzi region. Sarah Coles McElroy, "Forging a new Role for Women: Zhili First Women's Normal School and the Growth of Women's Education in China, 1901-21," in *Education, Culture and Identity in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Glen Peterson, Ruth Hayhoe, and Yongling Lu (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 352.
- ²⁸ The Wen Mei School was the secondary school for girls in the Weixian Station.
- ²⁹ "Mateer, Madge Dickson (Mrs. Robert McCheyne), MD," PHS, RG401-88-8.
- ³⁰ Madge was Robert Mateer's second wife. His first wife, Sadie Archibald, died in 1886. "Mateer, Rev. Robert McCheyne, D. D.," PHS, RG401/88/6.
- ³¹ Mrs. John M. Coulter, "Silver Series: Mrs. Robert M. Mateer, MD," PHS, RG401/88/8, 1-2.
- ³² For this paper I have chosen to use the term "primary schools." In other studies and missionary literature they are also referred to as "elementary schools" or "country schools."
- ³³ Dan Cui, "British Protestant Educational Activities and the Nationalization of Chinese Education in the 1920s," in *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Glen Peterson, Ruth Hayhoe, and Yongling Lu (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 138-139.
- ³⁴ McElroy, 349-355.
- ³⁵ S. A. Mateer, "China," *WWW* 13, no. 11 (1883): 368.
- ³⁶ It is interesting that the missionaries started educating female students in the primary schools before a secondary institution was organized. As noted above, the Wen Mei School was not opened until 1895.
- ³⁷ *52nd Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1889*, PHS, 151; "Report of the Wei Hien Mission for 1888," PHS, MF10.F761a.r216; and "J. Leyenberger to F. Ellinwood," 1888, Weixian, PHS, MF10.F761a.r207.
- ³⁸ *53rd Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1890*, PHS, 55-56 and "R. Mateer to F. Ellinwood," February 21, 1889, Wooster, PHS, MF10.F761a.r207.
- ³⁹ "General Plan and Constitution of Girls' Boarding School," November 1882, Dengzhou, PHS, MF10.F761a.r205.
- ⁴⁰ "Personal Report of Madge D. Mateer, Weihsien, Shantung, China, 1917-1918," PHS, RG82/16/1/20-8.
- ⁴¹ "Report of R. Mateer for Jan. 1891-Jan. 1892," January 17, 1892, Weixian, PHS, MF10.F761a.r216.
- ⁴² "Report of Emma F. Boughton," January 12, 1892, Weixian, PHS, MF10.F761a.r216.
- ⁴³ "Report of J. A. Fitch to the Shantung Mission for the Year 1894," PHS, MF10.F761a.r216.
- ⁴⁴ *65th Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1902*, PHS, 105, and "Station Report for Period Aug. 10, 1901-Oct. 1, 1902," Weixian, PHS, MF10.F761a.r260.
- ⁴⁵ Thogersen, 41.

Notes

¹ Susan Mann, "The Education of Daughters in the Mid-Ch'ing Period," in *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*, ed. Benjamin Elman and Alexander Woodside (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 20.

² Mann, 38.

³ Stig Thøgersen notes that even in the last years of the Qing when modern education systems slowly developed, education for girls was not an integral part of this process until the late-1910s. Stig Thøgersen, *A County of Culture: Twentieth-Century China Seen from the Village Schools of Zouping, Shandong* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 45.

⁴ Mary Bergen refers to her impressions of women in a letter in 1885. "I well remember a class that was held for the 'half paralytics' (as Mr. Mateer called them), for the better halves of preachers who were dead weights to their husbands' progress and work." M. Bergen, "Letter regarding 1906 Women's Conference at Weihsien." May 12, 1906. Presbyterian Historical Society (hereafter PHS).

⁵ Weixian (Wei-hsien) is located in central Shandong and is now listed under the name Weifang.

⁶ Weixian was briefly the home of the Arts College until it was transferred to Jinan.

⁷ Ralph Wells, "The Point Breeze High School at Wei Hsien." *Assembly Herald* 11, 2 (February 1905): 65.

⁸ 82nd Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1920. PHS.

⁹ Jessie Lutz, *China and the Christian Colleges, 1850-1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971).

¹⁰ Gael Graham, *Gender, Culture, and Christianity: American Protestant Mission Schools in China, 1880-1930* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1995).

¹¹ Kathleen Lodwick, *Educating the Women of Hainan: The Career of Margaret Moninger in China, 1915-1942* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

¹² Graham, 20.

¹³ Graham, 18.

¹⁴ Florence Fulton, "In Behalf of Our Chinese Sisters," *Woman's Work for Woman* (hereafter as WWW) 6, no. 2 (1891): 44.

¹⁵ G. Brown, *Earthen Vessels and Transcendent Power: American Presbyterians in China 1837-1952* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 10-25.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 27-38.

¹⁷ Dengzhou (Penglai) was later replaced by Chefoo (Yantai) as the open port in Shandong. Brown, *Op cit*, 54.

¹⁸ *North China Herald*, 203, no. 3642 (May 26, 1937), 321.

¹⁹ 51st Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1888, PHS, 181.

²⁰ Annual Report of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 1880 (New York: General Assembly of the American Presbyterian Church, 1881), 69.

²¹ Ibid, 69.

²² Irwin T. Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess: Three Nineteenth-Century American Missionaries in East Shantung* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 183 and Brown, 80.

²³ 43rd Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church, 1880, PHS, 66-67.

Founded by the missionaries as part of the evangelistic efforts, the school system took on a life of its own after 1900 as China developed and began to modernize herself after the fall of the Qing Dynasty. As previous studies have shown, women gained much from these developments as the old societal strictures were slowly torn down. The Chinese educational system was also impacted by these changes and slowly opened new opportunities for girls and young women to enter the workforce as teachers. To educate their daughters, the Christian community, both the male and female members of the Church, turned to the mission school system. This was in line with the emphasis on private schools (the old-styled *sishu*) for basic education in many rural areas. Missionary schools fit into this system perfectly. This illustrates how the success of the Christian missionary education system largely responded to societal changes in China and how the system gradually became independent from the control of Western missionaries.

students attending classes in the missionary education system. This had a much greater impact on the lives of women than any work done at the high school level. It incorporated a larger section of the population, established new institutions before the Chinese government turned its attention to female education, and set the stage for the interaction between western women and Chinese girls. The expansion of the school system also heavily impacted the higher education institutions and was the motivating force behind building teacher-training programs by the missionaries and local Christians. The new institutions and training programs went a long way towards breaking the barriers that kept women out of professional positions in the past. Many now became professionals outside the home for the first time.

This social transformation did not solely result from the missionaries' efforts to change China. Female missionaries were reluctant to relinquish control of their schools to the local population. This was particularly notable with the response of Madge Mateer, who was surprised that the changes in the primary schools were showing positive results. There is evidence of the male missionaries relinquishing some responsibility to the male teachers in the late nineteenth century. The female missionaries, on the other hand, did not attempt the same policies with their teachers. There is no immediate explanation for this, but we can make a few assumptions regarding the relationship between the missionaries and Chinese women. Specifically, this relates to their experiences in the United States and on the mission field. As other studies have shown, they had more freedom than their predecessors but were still restricted to certain roles and kept out of major decision-making bodies in the field. In the work of female missionaries, therefore, one can note tensions with the male missionaries making them less willing to give more responsibility to Chinese women. While this did not cause conflict at the time in Weixian, it is a tension that is not noted as much in the boys' schools.

graduated from the Anqiu School. His work also allowed more women to take up positions in the government schools and other local schools. What was surprising for the foreigners was that the teachers coming from this school had only a general primary education with one year additional training at Anqiu.⁸¹ By 1918 the teachers in the girls' country schools numbered forty-two of which thirteen came from the Anqiu Normal School and twenty-three were graduates of the Wen Mei School.⁸² Although Pastor Liu's institution was never intended to supplant the missionary training system, the education it gave was important both for the local government schools and the expansion of the girls' school network.

Due to the efforts of foreign missionary women and the local Chinese the number of female teachers in the system began to climb, as shown in Table 1. Although they continued to lag behind the number of male teachers, by 1907 female teachers constituted a majority of those employed in the girls' primary schools.⁸³ The different methods developed for training female teachers had a significant influence on women and the local society. For the first time, large numbers of women were engaged in a professional activity unrelated to the traditional role of women in the family. They were the sole authority in the classroom and acted as administrators in the primary schools. Evidence of the desire to develop a new role for women in society continued and in 1917 all fourteen members of the Wen Mei School's graduating class were expecting to enter the teaching profession.⁸⁴ As others have noted, this new teaching force provided a new model of the modern woman for other young girls, much as the female missionaries had done for them.⁸⁵

Conclusion

As the second decade of the twentieth century dawned, the educational system of the Weixian station was firmly established. The country primary schools, in particular, experienced an increase in the number of schools and growth in the number of female

pursue careers without attending the Wen Mei School. The missionaries wanted to take their efforts one step further and establish a post-secondary normal institution for girls. The newly established Education Committee first came up with the idea for a post-secondary school to train female teachers that would augment the curriculum of the Wen Mei School. However, many were satisfied that the secondary schools could provide the teachers and role models required by the field. The opponents of the plan were eventually overruled and in its annual report for 1913 the Shandong Mission stated the goal to create a women's college.⁷⁹ The goal of the institution was to provide more training for female teachers, but at the time it was not thought feasible due to the expense.

Although the female missionaries were forced to back off their goal of establishing a training institution, Liu Guang-zhao, Pastor of the local Church, and his wife adopted the plan and founded a school in Anqiu, south of Weixian, in 1914. Liu had worked extensively in education as the head of a local government middle school and in the teacher training institutes held by the Presbyterian missionaries. The course ran for nine months after which a certificate of completion was awarded. The school was basically self-supporting with funds coming from the students, local officials, and "one or two foreigners."⁸⁰ His institution opened with thirty-one students from both the government and mission schools. They were generally made up of pupils who, for one reason or another, could not attend or finish the full course at the Wen Mei School and only had a primary school education. This was the only opportunity open to many and the only attempt to create a training institute for teachers. The Anqiu Normal School quickly expanded by opening a day school for training purposes, and it employed three government teachers.

The impact of this training institute on the primary school system was immeasurable. Without the work of Pastor Liu, the conversion of the girls' primary schools would never have been realized. By 1914 almost half of the female teachers had

teachers to join a class of outstation leaders and evangelists for six weeks during the summer.⁷⁵ It was intended to upgrade the qualification of existing teachers and to provide training in new subjects for students unable to attend secondary school but wanted to teach. For girls' schools this was one way to bypass the secondary schools and obtain more female teachers for the field. The instruction at the first meeting, however, was essentially religious rather than an attempt to make the curriculum more uniform or to increase the effectiveness of the teachers. For the girls' schools the initial goal of providing a larger female teaching force was never realized. As shown in Table 1, there were only seven female teachers by 1890 and even by 1900 it only reached twelve.

In a continuing effort to increase the number of qualified female teachers Madge Mateer began her own training course. Using the system to train male teachers before 1900 as a model, she called together a class for courses in religion, hygiene, and other secular subjects.⁷⁶ Her efforts to develop a separate training system were incorporated into the general station work and slowly more women attended the yearly training courses for teachers. After 1911 the institutes were upgraded and began to provide instruction in mainly secular topics. The 1914 institute, held over eighteen days during a school break, is emblematic of the changing curriculum required in the primary schools. It contained studies in "Primary Method, Combination of Primary and Intermediate Courses Under One Teacher, Elementary and Advanced Chinese Literature, Geography, History, Nature Study, Drawing, Manual Training, and Music."⁷⁷ Unlike those in the nineteenth century, it concentrated on secular subjects and pedagogical methods over religious training. Female teachers took full advantage of the new opportunity for training. In 1914 forty women out of 101 participants were in attendance. This was a much larger percentage than at any of the previous institutes.⁷⁸

The training institutes held at the central station in Weixian provided much needed instruction to female teachers that did not have much of an opportunity to

a training ground for teachers. Without a university or other institution of higher education it was up to the secondary schools to provide whatever training was necessary for a girl to be a successful teacher. The new opportunities for women in the field also gave the Shandong Mission grounds to insist that women move outside the home to become the leaders of their communities.

It is the policy of the Mission to maintain at the Stations and other large centers girls' high schools for the higher Christ an education of the brighter girls from the country schools, with the purpose of fitting them for their responsibilities in making intelligent Christian homes, and for taking positions as teachers in the country schools for girls.⁷⁰

In 1911 Mateer changed the policy of the school and required each student to teach for two years after their graduation.⁷¹ She also advocated for teacher training to be included as a set course in girls' secondary schools throughout the province. Two years later the Education Committee of the Shandong Mission voted that the girls' secondary schools needed to offer training within the regular curriculum. This was aside from a further course required after graduation to prepare the students for a future in the classroom.⁷²

The Wen Mei School was an important step in the transformation of women's roles in the society. However, it was quickly overcrowded and many times it could not accommodate the students from its own primary system not to mention the girls from other fields applying to continue their education.⁷³ In addition, the demands from other provinces and the local government schools for female teachers were gobbling up the graduates leaving Weixian with few female teachers to staff its own schools.⁷⁴

To augment the training for existing primary school teachers, the missionaries held periodic teaching institutes at the central station. Before the introduction of professional schools this was the most common method for producing qualified teachers. The first class was organized in 1890 with an invitation for the primary school

Laughlin felt it would damage their ability to spread Christianity and to expand education for women throughout the field. They needed these girls to remain active and dedicated to both of these goals.

In 1893 the possibility of establishing a secondary school for girls resurfaced. Throughout the Shandong Mission there were 429 female pupils in both boarding and day schools.⁶⁵ In addition, the female students in the primary schools were excelling academically. This showed that local Chinese families valued education for their daughters. The increasing need to supply teachers for the primary schools also put pressure on the station to open a new school. On September 18, 1895, the Wen Mei School was opened with twenty-four pupils, two Chinese teachers, and Emma Boughton as principal. It was set up with a four-year curriculum and the first full class of seventeen students graduated in 1899.⁶⁶ The buildings of the school; large classroom, student dormitories, a dining room, a kitchen, and a bathing area; were constructed between 1895 and 1896.⁶⁷ To ensure that the students received the domestic training they would have had at home, the school required each student to clean her own room.

However, the impact of the new graduates was not immediately felt. As Table 1 shows, the number of female teachers rose slowly after its opening. While they may not have been taking positions in the mission primary schools, the graduates were entering the teaching profession in the local society. The records indicate that private schools set up by "well-to-do" Christians recruited Wen Mei students.⁶⁸ Although no reason is given for this, it is likely that the new schools paid better than the mission institutions. Nevertheless, the school was fulfilling the purpose of female education laid out by the Shandong Mission in the 1880s. The graduates were returning to the community as teachers and community leaders.⁶⁹

The political and social conditions in the twentieth century, particularly after the 1911 Revolution, permitted Madge Mateer to expand the role of the Wen Mei School as

teacher training classes, and the development of a normal school for those without a high school education.

Their first option was to hire the graduates of the missionary secondary schools where they received a good general education and many were Christians. In the case of Weixian this was the Wen Mei School.⁶² Once the girls' primary schools began to show promise, the missionaries began planning a high school for girls within the station compound. It had been Sadie Mateer's first instinct to open a school for girls, but in the 1880s the time was not right for such a move. Nevertheless, she saw future success for such an institution.

There is ample work here for a lady; we could have a large girls' school, and it is a grand locality for getting daughter[s] of Christian parents. The work among the women alone will be a grand one, surrounded, as we are, by hundreds of villages. There is scarcely any limit to the opportunity.⁶³

Others were not won over to the idea of expanding higher education for girls in the station. Jennie Laughlin was particularly vocal on this issue arguing in 1890 that many students would not want to return home after graduating.

I will give you an instance to explain what I mean - a girl from the Tungchow [Dengzhou] school who is teaching [at] one of these day school requested to come to Wei Hien [Weixian] to spend her vacation. It would be rather an expensive trip [and] any way I wanted her to go to her mothers to help her mother who had a young baby, and also to teach some women in that village as she had opportunity but she said her room at her house was not nice and she could not stand it and she would not go but spend her vacation in the school room which was large and comfortable.⁶⁴

having so many school centers, as well as popularizing the education of girls.⁵⁸

The Road to a Women's Teacher Training School

One of the missionaries' biggest concerns in their schools was the quality and quantity of the teaching force. They were constantly searching for ways to train teachers for the schools. In its original form, missionary education was set up to reinforce an ideology without fully preparing the student for the life he/she would have after graduation. As the systems grew, more emphasis was placed on teacher education. Dan Cui has recently noted that teacher training was a major accomplishment of the missionary schools and by 1930 almost 95% of teachers were trained in mission schools.⁵⁹ Although Cui was writing more generally about male and female teachers, it is clear that the mission schools were really the first to offer this training and opportunities to girls before the educational system was fully opened to them in the twentieth century. In north China it was not until 1906 that the Beiyang Women's Normal School was founded to provide Chinese primary schools with female teachers.⁶⁰

Throughout their history the Weixian missionaries strove to improve the course offerings in the primary schools in line with changes in the secondary schools. However, there was a relatively small number of Chinese qualified to teach the advanced curriculum in both the primary and secondary schools. There were even fewer women, a preferable choice for teachers in girls' schools, trained to conduct the classes. The only teachers qualified to incorporate them were male graduates of Dengzhou College, who, because of their advanced training, demanded high salaries that many schools could not afford.⁶¹ Even in those areas where the missionaries tried to introduce female teachers, they found that this was detrimental to the school. The Weixian missionaries used three forums to train female teachers: their secondary school for girls, periodic

that a larger proportion of girls would be able to obtain an education and become an integral part of the new Republic.

From the above it is clear that the Chinese were more interested than the missionaries in creating schools in line with the newly-established government systems. The local population continued pushing for more schools that eventually became part of the missionary system and forced changes in missionary policies. The coeducation policy also assured that the new schools would not be created at the expense of education for girls. Many were eventually incorporated into the Christian school system to take advantage of the opportunities for further education it offered.

With the changes noted above, the number of primary schools increased from sixty-seven in 1913 to ninety-two in 1920. The number of pupils increased from 1,416 to 2,027. Although the number of boys in the schools increased at a faster rate than the girls, by 1917 there were forty-one girls' primary schools and three intermediate level schools for girls.⁵⁷ It is evident from these figures that the changes in the girls' schools increased the opportunity for a larger number of female students to obtain an education and there was no duplication of schools in the field. In 1914 John Fitch reported one older woman's view of the new opportunities for girls in the Weixian field:

One old widow and her widowed daughterinlaw [sic], non-church members, had given a fine room. The old lady told me of how much help the young teacher had been to her, and of how much help she had received by having the school in her yard. She said "One year and a half ago my only son cried one eye blind, and the other almost. My heart received no comfort, until we opened this school for girls. And now every time I come into the schoolroom, my heart re-joices [sic] to see these girls studying, including three of my own grand daughters." She told us, too, of how faithful the teacher was in helping the women prepare for church members. I believe this will be one of the great advantages of

support for girls during their first two years was withdrawn.⁵² This resolution followed the ideas of the 1911 Conference of Provincial Educational Associations that stressed the importance of coeducation for Chinese schools.⁵³ It appears that this was the first policy adopted by the government towards this end. The effect on Weixian's boarding schools was immediately felt. Many parents withdrew their daughters from the expensive boarding schools and enrolled them in the day schools.⁵⁴

While this action was responsible for opening the school system to more female students, Madge Mateer, nominal head of the girls' primary schools, was not pleased with the new development. She felt that boarding schools were better for the students. However, on her first inspection tour in 1914 she was impressed by the success of the system. Forty-one girls were attending fifteen boys' schools and fifty-four boys were attending thirteen girls' schools. In her report, Mateer stated:

With more or less of a pessimistic feeling as to the success of the new plan, i.e. of opening a large number of day schools for girls, in place of boarding schools, as formerly, we started out to make the first inspection....We were indeed agreeably surprised at the success of both. In most of the places, good well lighted rooms had been provided with not a cent of expense to the Board. The teachers too were doing good work, tho' many of these in the Primary Schools have had but the primary education, with a year of Normal work under pastor Liu Kwang Chao. These teachers many of them are helping the women of the village in the study of the Bible. In two places a number of young married women were taking the regular course, studying at home, and coming for examination on Saturday.⁵⁵

While acknowledging the small number of pupils taking advantage of the new policy, the missionaries were heartened by the fact that education for girls was more popular in the country districts.⁵⁶ Combined with the new emphasis on day schools there was hope

government schools.⁴⁸ This action was generally taken by the formation of cooperation committees and other joint efforts with local Christians.

In 1913 the Weixian missionaries organized the first Cooperation Committee that involved both the Chinese and foreign members of the mission.⁴⁹ One branch of this new group was the Education Committee that was given responsibility for overseeing the primary schools. The Chinese made full use of their position and asserted their interests.⁵⁰ At the time of the Education Committee's formation, girls' schools were overcrowded and the system could not expand without a massive investment of funds. This was seen to be the result of the boarding school model. The appropriations from the United States were no longer sufficient to support the expansion of these schools. Therefore, the Committee began to make changes that impacted the growth of the entire school system.

Its first major challenge was to tackle the boarding school issue. The foreign missionaries did not want to change the system. However, the problem of accessibility weighed heavily on the school system and the Education Committee took a firm stand. Under its direction all but two of the girls' primary boarding schools were transformed into day schools. This resulted in thirty-four new schools for girls with two boarding schools acting as intermediate schools.⁵¹ In addition, schools were opened with the funds left over from the appropriations for the boarding schools. It is clear that the Committee was responding to new realities in Chinese society that provided greater freedom for women and a desire to increase access to education rather than being overly concerned with protecting girls as had been the case before. They were also responding to changes in government policy that provided for female education.

The change to day schools hinged on a new coeducation policy that gave girls greater access to education. It required that girls under eleven years attend the boys' day schools if one was located nearby. To enforce the new regulation the boarding

provincial schools in Weixian were “languishing” and they moved to solidify their position as the best opportunity for education in the area.⁴⁷ As a result, the number of pupils in the school system almost doubled. Mission schools were often the only viable system around and students flocked to them. This is especially true in the case of female students. Even when changes in education were put in place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this did not always equate to a more open system for female students. Therefore, in many areas the missionary school system remained the only option for girls to receive an education.

The first phase of the primary school system ended in 1911. The Weixian missionaries established a school system consisting of both primary and secondary schools that extended throughout the field. In many ways their goal of providing girls with increased access to education and new positions in society was accomplished. The records show that over 200 girls were active in the primary schools and female teachers were eagerly sought for those schools. However, there were still problems that needed to be addressed. The opportunity for girls was still small and the system for the primary schools was unsuitable for quick expansion due to its emphasis on boarding schools. Finally, there was a problem of obtaining female teachers for the schools. More on this second issue will be addressed in the section on teacher training.

After the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the Weixian system saw many changes to its organization and structure. Up to this point it had been the female missionaries, particularly Madge Mateer, who provided the impetus for many of the changes in the school system for girls. The foreign school supervisors determined the policies and examined each school in the field. This control was challenged following the fall of the Qing Dynasty. Chinese Christians took a larger role in the schools and their involvement impacted the organization of the schools for girls where they emphasized day over boarding schools. This was true not just in Weixian but throughout China as school patrons demanded that mission schools follow the path set out by the emerging

Table 1: Numbers of Female Students and Teachers in Weixian Station, 1885-1920⁴⁶

Dates	Primary School Students	Wen Mei School	Female Teachers
1885-1886	--	--	2
1887-1888	15	--	3
1888-1889	2	--	12
1889-1890	151	--	7
1890-1891	145	--	9
1893-1894	238	--	10
1894-1895	235	24	--
1895-1896	215	30	--
1897-1898	80	37	12
1898-1899	--	41	--
1901-1902	Incomplete	17	--
1902-1903	--	38	--
1903-1904	--	35	--
1905-1906	360	60	--
1906-1907	213 boarding	64	19
1907-1908	230 boarding	62	12
1909-1910	324	62	21
1912-1913	471	--	37
1913-1914	480	66	39
1914-1915	555	66	51
1915-1916	485	68	49
1916-1917	550	45	52
1917-1918	572	55	34
1919-1920	585	80	34

reformulate their education policies. In the twentieth century the universities and secondary schools saw massive expansion of the school plants and student numbers. Although the annual reports did not report much about them, the primary schools also saw significant changes once the missionaries returned. In particular, there was a renewed effort in the primary schools to put them under the control of Chinese administrators and teachers leading to a larger influence over the schools by the local population.

As the missionaries returned to Weixian in the spring of 1901, they immediately called for the start of classes in the primary schools. They wanted to show that there were no feelings of hostility towards the population and they did not want their meticulously organized school system to fall into disrepair. The following year they reported that thirty-five schools had been organized with 350 pupils in attendance. This was only 100 less than before 1900.⁴⁴ The missionaries were particularly concerned that apathy towards women's education did not set in and moved quickly to reopen these institutions. Many were afraid that the society would lapse back into the tradition of denying girls access to schools. As Table 1 shows, the number of girls attending school rose quickly after 1900. However, the success of rebuilding education for girls did not fulfill missionary expectations for expanding new opportunities and access to the mission institutions. Many of the boarding schools took on students as day pupils to try to open up the system to more girls, but there were too few schools to make much of an impact. The existing system could not fill the new desire of families to educate their daughters.

As the missionaries reentered the interior of Shandong, a change in the educational system in China was underway that heavily affected the missionary school systems. Begun during the reform movement in 1898, by 1907 a national educational system was established by the Qing government.⁴⁵ The missionaries noted that the new

Christianity and Female Empowerment

access to education. Those schools that were set up tended to be small and, therefore, could not accommodate many pupils. Due to this policy, the number of boys attending school increased while the number of girls lagged behind. Even when local Christians established schools for girls, they did not support them to the same extent as their schools for boys.³⁸ Although there were many obstacles, education for girls did expand throughout the Weixian field. As shown in Table 1, by 1894 there were over 200 girls attending primary schools. The general course guide outlined in the General Plan of the Chefoo Girls' School was used as the basis of the Weixian system. The primary school system took the first two years of the curriculum that emphasized the Chinese classics, early Bible study, and basic arithmetic.³⁹ Madge Mateer later added hygiene and health to this basic curriculum.⁴⁰

Although very pleased with the general outlook of the boys' system by the 1890s, the missionaries were concerned about the perceived "backwardness of female education." Robert Mateer specifically noted that the girls' schools did "little more than teach to read" and did not "wake up the minds and ambitions of the girls."⁴¹ The female missionaries quickly rectified the situation through increased visits to the countryside where they personally examined students in the schools on a regular basis.⁴² Their work in this area had been hampered in the past, but the arrival of Emma Boughton and a stable missionary force for the first time provided the necessary support for this work that the male missionaries could not engage in as freely. One year later the girls were passing their exams and, at times, were better students than the boys.⁴³ It is clear that in the mind of the missionaries a new interest in female education was dawning. Women were becoming an important part of the mission's work as Bible women and the female missionaries in charge of the schools were looking to do more for girls in the area.

In 1900 the work in the primary schools was brought to halt as the missionaries were forced to retreat to the coastal cities during the Boxer Uprising. Rather than becoming discouraged, those involved in education took this as an opportunity to

opening primary schools for girls, something that was done without official permission until 1907, the conservative intellectual environment hampered their efforts. Women's education was never fully supported by the Chinese government and regulations were passed stating that female teachers could only teach in girls' schools. The policy resulted in stagnation in the expansion of education for girls.³⁴ Missionaries provided new models of schooling for women and the missionary wives and single women who oversaw the systems provided role models for a new generation of Chinese girls.

In 1888 the Weixian missionaries undertook the task of establishing primary schools as a response to the increasing desire for students to attend the Boys' Academy that was opened in 1883. Although the initial impetus for primary schools came out of a need to educate male church members and evangelists, girls' primary schools were also opened at this time. There was a notable need to educate girls at an early age to provide a stronger foundation for the Church in the community and to provide Bible women to help the evangelists. The necessity to provide education for women was noted as early as 1883 by Sadie Mateer who reported that her work among women progressed slowly because "their minds are not as much trained to thought as the men's are."³⁵ The basic skills taught in the primary schools were seen as allowing women to overcome the gap in education between men and women opening a new segment of society to Christianity. The primary school curriculum would also serve to give women a new understanding of womanhood and assist in the development of Christian households.³⁶ The first year closed with fifteen girls in boarding schools.³⁷

When developing primary schools for girls, many groups established their schools on a day school model. The missionaries in Weixian, on the other hand, chose a boarding school model for their field. The female missionaries felt that it was only through the boarding schools that they could provide the protection the parents wanted and that the Christian morals of the girls could be upheld. The policy of using boarding schools resulted in a very slow start to the establishment of girls' schools and limited

application was officially accepted and she sailed for Shandong in November.²⁹ Once there she worked in the women's hospital and dispensary. A year later, in 1890, she married Robert Mateer and immediately left her hospital work to focus on education and other evangelistic activities.³⁰ Her responsibilities included oversight of the girls' primary school system and training Bible women for work in the field. Although she left hospital work behind, she continued to use her medical training extensively giving lectures in the schools and throughout the Weixian field on a variety of topics such as hygiene, care of the home, sanitation, and children's healthcare.³¹ During the period of this study, she was the face of education in the station.

The Girls' Primary Schools in Weixian

Between 1860 and 1920 the missionary educational system for Chinese girls was composed primarily of primary and secondary schools.³² Although not studied as often, many groups had extensive networks of primary schools throughout their fields. These schools were the best means of reaching male and female students with only a low level of funds necessary for their upkeep. British missions, in particular, were interested in this area and by 1920 primary schools made up the majority of their work with 57,259 pupils attending their schools.³³ During the imperial period, no effort was made to create state-supported elementary education. This was the purview of the community and local society based on the *sishu*, or private school, in which local families or villages hired teachers to educate children in the Confucian texts. The missionary school systems were adopted by the local population in China as an addition to the existing local institutions.

Missionaries considered primary schools especially important for girls as they provided the basis for all future endeavors whether in the classroom or as leaders in the Christian community. China's *sishu* schools did not offer much for girls outside the home. Although reformers in the late Qing and early Republican period contemplated